Y HOME-COMING

A Convert's Story

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My Home-Coming.

AT the request of my friends, I am delighted to make the following confession, in which I briefly explain the ways and considerations which brought me home to the Mother Church:

In childhood I received a strict religious training in the Evangelical Lutheran confession. Holy Scripture was to me always God's revealed word, which I never doubted, by which I shaped my thoughts and acts according to my best understanding of it. I considered myself on the only right ground. If one point or another of Lutheran teaching was not quite clear to me, I blamed only myself, seeing in my difficulties *secrets of faith* which surely God would make plain in His own good time. For half a century I knew the Christian life exclusively among Protestants who believed in Christ, loved Christ, and who were faithfully devoted to Christ, and with whom I was one, heart and soul. And all who knew me, knew that my standpoint was opposed to the Catholic Church.

The picture I had formed of the Catholic Church, through clerical and historic instruction, and personal observation was fixed; I never for a moment doubted that it was correct in every way. The Catholic Church was to me a horrible caricature of Christ's teaching: full of misunderstanding of the Gospel, full of priestly adulterations, full of moral ambiguities, full of abuse of holy privileges, full of greed and pomp on one side, lacking in the instruction and training of the people on the other,

with much evil everywhere. These things did not seem to me as an abnormal growth on a healthy organism. They proved convincingly that the Catholic Christianity was unsound, root and branch. Everything Catholic I consequently regarded with suspicion, and inwardly resisted. The blood went to my head when I thought of the terrible wars of religion; the battles for the faith of earlier days, of which I so often heard. I never put my foot in a Catholic Church, except to admire the art there, and even then not without inward protest against the ruling spirit dominant in these buildings. I could not, however, help admire the splendor and beauty which unfolded itself in the Church worship and art. The music thrilled me, but great was my protest that all this should be in the service of that miserable principle which put the visible above the invisible, power against conscience, men in place of God. My innermost soul rebelled against the traffic to defraud credulous people of eternal salvation as far as it was possible for men to do so, under the blasphemous title of "the one saving Church." To permit a pope or other lord of conscience to judge between God and myself as to right and wrong, seemed to me a sin of conscious apostasy from God and from the sources of revelation then known to me. With God alone I went to school. With Him alone I would stand or fall.

My intercourse with simple Catholics was marked with reserve. I took pains not to disturb their ignorant belief with our Lutheran teaching, which seemed to me far more profound and spiritual. I was certain that Catholics with their limitations, were in no condition to grasp it. I pitied their confidence in the priest's blessing, in priestly ordination, in the power of consecrated things,

and in the virtue of pilgrimages, and I grieved deeply when a fisherman's innocent daughter, named Bridget, told us with piety and earnestness that on Easter morning she and many others had undertaken a pilgrimage barefoot to the mountain of Ireland. The Pope had accorded these pilgrims a plenary indulgence. The poor thing! I thought, from whence has this man power and authority to do such a thing? The faithful *Jesus,* however, will help thee, hungry, thirsty soul, in spite of these human inventions. He will extinguish thy guilt, but *only* by His own holy Word.

Yet I must remark, that during the forty-five years I attended regularly the preaching of the word of God from our own pulpits, I heard no hateful word, with one exception, said against Rome. On the contrary, the Catholic Church was often called the sister Church. When I found something Catholic which my conscience before God could accept, I was heartily grateful. My church choir in the north often sung old Catholic music, as far as it could be adapted to our service. I valued much some legends of saints, although regarding them as wonderful, edifying inventions. In our folk hymns and folk art I found heart tones of crystal purity, heart tones which had their root in old Catholic mother ground. From childhood I was particularly familiar with the old crusading hymn: "Most Beautiful Lord Jesus." Occasionally I ventured, with profound emotion, to sing the solemn finishing verse: "Thou art verily always present in the Most Holy Sacrament." My friend, a Waldensian, Professor Revel in Florence, once heard me, and said sorrowfully as a warning: "....But this is Catholic!" This single word was and continued to be always decisive. It never occurred to me that the Catholic view,

which I saw always from the wrong side, had a genuine and right side too.

I presume everybody has looked first at a Gothic stained-glass window from the outside, with its black-looking confused lines conveying nothing to the mind. Then, stepping inside the church, he has seen the same window from within transformed by light, and was stirred to his depths by its indescribable beauty and harmony of color. No more contradiction, no more confusion! Everything fits perfectly, one part into another, presenting to the eye a clear and perfect picture. This optical phenomenon is a faint index of what my soul experienced *psychologically,* when at last with good will I considered from within the Church which so long I had seen only from without.

The first occasion seemed of slight importance. The words of Jesus (Matt. xvi. 18, 19): "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven," suddenly penetrated me with the whole force of their clear meaning. I was startled, and astonished and said to myself: "How curious, when Jesus so plainly says it! but it cannot be true!" Yet my astonishment continued. Unexpectedly this impression was intensified by a curious incident. The evening of the same day a countryman of mine, an artist who had been very intimate at our house, announced his conversion to the Catholic Church. For the second time I found myself obliged to value someone highly both professionally and as a man,

in spite of his being a Catholic. The first occasion was when we entertained as our guest a member of Parliament, Peter Reichensperger, who was a great politician, a sincere Christian, and a convinced, faithful Catholic. We received him as an unknown quantity, a psychological puzzle we Protestants could not understand, and left him in the hands of God. We reasoned somewhat thus about these cases: Reichensperger having been born and raised in the Catholic religion and in the traditions of his family, his belief was strong in him; for it is remarkable what filial piety is capable of in noble characters. But that a thinking, conscientious adult, not bound by family traditions, of his own free will and inclination, should become a convert, a Catholic! this was a phenomenon we never could understand. At best it was like a man who again deliberately puts on his shoes of childhood.

From that day, however, I could not rid myself of an inward warning voice, which at times became stronger; a voice which said to me again and again: If thou wouldst have peace study more perfectly than hitherto *the original Christian Church,* from which all later Christian societies have sprung.

At last I resolved to test the teaching of the original Church at the root, Bible in hand. And I began my study with a holy and profound earnestness. I read and looked Catholic teaching straight in the eye in Catholic dogmatic works. But I did it as a full-blooded Protestant. I felt myself so secure in the conscious possession of the whole of evangelical Christianity, that I flattered myself with the hope that I could win over sincere Catholics.

Little by little I penetrated deeper into the organism of the Catholic Church. My view widened, and I looked

out over glorious vistas of which formerly I had no idea. At times I became timid and anxious, and refused to yield myself to the power of the truth when I found what I would not, or rather, dared not find. But after the lapse of some months, after continued earnest studies I had to acknowledge the truth. It was really so; I had discovered a new world of positive Christianity. New saving truths stood clear before me, so clear that all I had read and gathered formerly, except the Holy Scripture, faded and dwindled before my eyes.

Twist as I would, it was of no use: everywhere something whole, something complete confronted me, not merely piecework, not a few dead precepts, but clearly founded upon the Gospel. It was a structure of teaching perfectly fitted together, clear in spirit. A building so unified, so honest and simple, yet so magnificently planned, that its simple unity and greatness of plan stood before me as compelling witnesses of its divine origin. There was absolutely no ambiguous turning aside from the truth, no minimizing of the goal, as I had expected, but in all things *Jesus* everywhere the foundation, *Jesus* everywhere the authority. The Catholic catechism, exact, complete, contrary to my former ideas, contained the key to everything. The Bible was woven through the sacraments and doctrine, conserved, defended and guarded as the apple of the eye of faith, in a *living Church.*

This discovery impressed me. I was no longer satisfied with books alone. I wished by personal observation to learn the practical life in the Catholic Church. This side of the matter I also undertook in holy earnest, beseeching and praying God for light upon the whole difficult problem.

I had the opportunity to be present at Catholic services

in Bavaria, Austria, Italy and Switzerland, Baden and Wurtemberg. Unhindered and unobserved I saw Catholic priests and laity, now alone, now together with others. Everywhere the devotion of the clergy and the participation of the congregation was genuine and blameless, and one and the same spirit prevailed through the whole service. The services began at daybreak while the world still slept. On Sundays the big churches were continually filled from five o'clock in the morning until noon, and in the afternoon I could again watch the same glorious spectacle until night. This constant stream to the churches, so evidently a most natural thing, this great, quiet throng, was it only outward hypocrisy and deception? Could a blind, defrauded people march so firmly, so happily, so heartily around the Lamb of God? No, no, I breathed an air of home, and it aroused in me memories of solemn and hearty alliance, mission, and sanctification meetings with my brethren of the faith in Germany, France and England. In my inmost soul I had to acknowledge this too as *genuinely* Christian and human, and so welcome it.

Likewise I learned to know people in holy orders of different nationalities. I had the opportunity to converse with them of Jesus, of the Bible, of the Church. They were familiar with everything. They stood on deep, firm ground. They were ripe in God. They were charitable in deed, and spoke with heartfelt love of "the separated brethren." Yet immovable in one thing: the doctrines of faith; their unity was astonishing.

Moreover, I saw at close range and in full activity the intercourse between priests and people, which we had regarded with so much suspicion. For hours I witnessed the heartiest and most profound devotion before the con-

fessionals. Frequently I was present at the warm impressive instructions of the priests, the spontaneous folk songs and pious devotion of the Holy Way of the Cross in commemoration of the Passion of Jesus. All my observations could detect nothing unsound. Notice this Catholic life where I would, anywhere and everywhere, consider it, now from one side, now from the other—always and everywhere I had to say to myself: This cannot be wrong; this evidently is built on a solid foundation; this cannot be ignorance; this must rest on true Christian humility; this cannot be an illusion of the senses, it must rest on purity of soul and piety.

Human frailty there was of course, but it could not outweigh the strongly *positive* good. My studies, my observation led more and more to this result: Here was not a decadent rotten tree, ready to fall, here was life and fresh growth under the care of God. Here I saw a true building of salvation, a Church, visible in her organization, although with a mystic body, which was the life principle of the whole, conveying life to all its members: and all the members together formed a living and continuous mutual society, one acting with and for the other in a way until then entirely unknown to me. They had a spiritual good in common that stretched far beyond the boundaries of time. The militant Church on earth cultivated familiar intercourse with the triumphant Church in heaven as well as with the suffering Church, those poor souls in the place of purification who were never forgotten. The people prayed for them, the people fasted for them. What glorious exercises of love! Everyone's endeavor was to gain and obtain God's gifts of grace, not for himself alone, but *for all the others in the bargain!* For those who on the other side of the grave need

mercy, for the whole living body which is called the Church. This fabric of love beautiful as heaven, knitting together all the members on earth, in heaven and in purgatory, into a living common body, the communion of saints, was to me the first plain mark, that *in fact such a Church exists on earth,* a Church which is the spouse of Christ, and which imitates the life of her heavenly Bridegroom even unto His bitter suffering. Now it became clear to me that the whole tradition of the Church rested precisely on this basis, and realized the words of the Apostles. In this light the words of St. Paul, hitherto so obscure to me, appeared clear and full of meaning; "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh for His body, *which is the Church*" (Col. i. 24).

It also did not escape my notice that Jesus throughout the centuries, according to His promise, has communicated Himself to members of this Church, and in supernatural ways, unknown, as far as I know, to even the most favored of His Protestant confessors. To doubt this one must believe the Catholic narrations of all times and countries for the past nineteen hundred years to have been a tissue of lies, and that is impossible. Moreover, the constantly recurring supernatural events in the lives of Catholic saints are no more than the literal confirmation and fulfillment of Our Lord's words (Matt. xxviii. 18-20, Mark xvi. 17, 18, John xiv. 12). It was and is the living continuation of the *Acts of the Apostles,* the history of the early Apostolic Church.

The Bible itself, my dear Bible, upon which I had fed all the days of my life, gained a new and constantly increasing light by my study of the life of the Church,

and still more by my study of the doctrine of the Church. When finally I dared to accept literally the passages I had passed by hitherto, because they seemed "Catholic," then one instantly illumined the other, one seemed to build upon the other, until they formed a perfect structure of teaching, with not a single stone missing; the whole built on the foundation laid by the Lord in Matt. xvi. 18, 19.

By placing myself decidedly and unreservedly on this word of the Lord, many difficulties disappeared: I no longer took offence at "the rock Peter;" at the authority to bind and to loose, as the Church exercises it; nor the "infallible chair of teaching" against which the gates of hell should not prevail; this chair of teaching which had been assured the assistance and guidance of the Holy Ghost *unto the end of time.* All this no longer repulsed me. On the contrary, I began to thank God for having raised a Lighthouse among the constantly changing waves of opinion, built upon an unshakeable foundation of rock, firm midst the wild rocking flight of phenomena. Taking the Bible words as a whole, it became clear to me that the Catholic interpretation, even in essential points, accords with Scripture more exactly and more strictly; that it throws more light on it than we Protestants do. If anybody had said this to me two years ago, I would have pitied him for being so fooled and defrauded. So little do even earnest, highly cultured Protestants know the Catholic Church and its inner life!

The ecclesiastical treasure of oral tradition no longer appeared strange: In St. John, chapter xvi., we read: "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot hear them now." Likewise in the twentieth and twenty-first chapters, that Jesus before His Ascension did so many

things, that the whole world would not be able to contain all the books that should be written about them. Where did Jesus deposit this treasure for further use and transmission through the ages, if not in the heart and spirit of the Apostles? This in no way contradicts the Gospel; this oral Apostolic tradition in no way belittles the other heavenly treasure, the New Testament, as soon as it becomes clear that the Bible was not the foundation but a document of the early Church. In the beginning the Church had not the New Testament to depend on, for it was not written, yet she "continued in the doctrine of the Apostles," according to the command of the Lord. If the Apostolic Church, *in virtue of her own tradition and authority,* had not subscribed to and acknowledged as inspired the documents of the New Testament *when they appeared in her midst,* and if she had not received them into the canon of the Bible, *how could we now have them?* Whoever regards the Bible as the infallible word of God, knowingly or unknowingly stands with the Catholic Church.

Formerly I looked with suspicion upon the Church's interpretation of the Bible. Now I had the desire and the courage to study it. And I did so after more than forty years of previous Scripture study, in which I had had the advantage of intercourse with theologians and lay students both native and foreign. I found the explanation of the Church illuminated wonderfully the very passages which in spite of all efforts in the past had remained obscure to me. I heartily submitted my reason to the old Fathers of the Church and their heirs and successors.

I was much impressed by the fact that our popular representation of the Catholic doctrine in regard to "good

works" was quite misleading, and absolutely *not Catholic*. The Catholic Church defined this matter clearly and concisely at the Council of Trent. In the official decisions of this Council, I found the justification of man, *through the grace of Jesus Christ,* set forth with a plainness and depth which could not possibly be more evangelical than it is. The same doctrine is repeated in the somewhat abridged Catholic catechism. According to the said Council: "If anyone say that man can be justified in the sight of God through his works, whether it be by the power of human nature or according to the teaching of the law, but without the divine grace through Jesus Christ: let him be anathema." Good works, according to the doctrine of the Church, are only possible when in a state of grace, and even then *only and solely in union with the merits of the suffering of Christ,* Who on the tree of the Cross obtained justification for us and made atonement to God the Father for us (Council of Trent). Through this union with the suffering of Christ the many encouraging words of Jesus as to reward for every good work, and for every suffering *for the sake of His name,* also came *really* in force. These words of Jesus always came to their full right in the Catholic Church.

For anybody who is not living in a state of grace, that is, who by mortal sin or disbelief is separated from God, there is absolutely no good work by which he can gain heaven, so long as this unhappy state lasts. On the other hand, according to Catholic doctrine, *perfect repentance* can lead the soul back to union with God, that is, a repentance and sorrow for sins committed based on *love of God.* Such perfect repentance opens again all the gates of grace, perfectly cleanses even the greatest sinner, as it did the thief on the cross, and gives him access

to heaven. Therefore the faithful endeavor of the pastor is to reëstablish the state of grace, to open the way of God to the sinner's heart, and to preserve communion with Him inviolate, and he is most happy to give absolution when he finds signs of repentance. Can anything more truly in the Gospel spirit be imagined?

But was not the confessional a place full of moral dangers, full of abused priestly dominion on one side, full of atrocious sinning against the mercy of God on the other? I must confess I had constantly and unhesitatingly believed all the evil I had heard of it. Now as I read Catholic instructions for confession, I found the earnest admonition: "He who confesses without true repentance or without earnest purpose and resolve to improve his life, he who will not avoid the approximate occasion of sin, as far as it is in his power, etc., *receives the Sacrament of Penance in vain,* and instead of getting his sins forgiven by the absolution of the priest, he becomes still more guilty of punishment in the sight of God, *and commits a sacrilege.*" Such is the earnest language of the books of instruction. Auricular confession provided me with a reasonable and satisfactory meaning of the words of Jesus: "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." By the auricular confession the priest is made capable of pronouncing a just verdict on the state of the sinner. Without auricular confession this is impossible, and absolution would have to be given according to humor and haphazard. Without it how could the priest judge of the repentant or unrepentant disposition? So I had to admit that confession was in itself sacred and earnest. If it was, or is criminally abused, those who do so commit a horrible sacrilege.

I now saw in auricular confession a wonderful, new, life-giving sacrament, full of grace, a sacrament the sanctity and inviolability of which was sealed with the martyr blood of the unbreakable secret of confession. Millions of souls have found consolation and re-birth in the Lord in this divine institution. Why were we deprived of this consolation?

I read discussions on indulgences, a word so abhorred by Protestants, a word which in spite of explanations always left us with the impression: "Absolution for money." And what did I find? I found that indulgences have nothing to do with absolution, and far less with absolution for money. Indulgences *do not wipe out any sins,* not a single one, not even the very least. Indulgences simply annul, entirely or in part, *the temporal punishment* which is a *consequence* of the sin. But even the temporal punishment cannot be annulled until its cause, the sins committed are *sincerely repented of, confessed and forgiven.* Indulgences do not detract from the merit of Christ. On the contrary, in indulgences *the atoning sufferings of Christ* are substituted for the atoning punishments. Since the Church, in virtue of her authority to bind and to loose, can forgive mortal sins, then surely she may dare, in the name of Jesus, to take away the punishment of sin as did also the Apostle Paul to a sinner in Corinth (1 Cor. v. 3-5; 2 Cor. ii. 5-11).

What the Church Fathers and the pious Christians in the Middle Ages considered the greatest blessing I also, learned to know and treasure as a gift of God. Now I could understand how St. Francis of Assisi could implore the Saviour and the Pope for a great indulgence for his little flock as the fulfilling of the deepest longing of his heart. This favorite of Jesus knew what he

did. This spiritual good can surely be abused; but the best things can always be abused, and unfortunately are so abused. But such abuse the Church has never countenanced. She has worked against it always. The Council of Trent emphatically forbids the misuse of indulgences, but their pious use it retains as a rich treasure of grace in the Church. The Church never has ceased to encourage the faithful to gain indulgences which are obtainable for all, even the poorest. This practice is still in full vigor in the whole Church. The conditions laid down by the Church for gaining an indulgence is first of all the soul's interior state of repentance, next some outward penance, such as visits to a church, pilgrimages, prayers or alms. The outward penance alone, however, does not suffice, it must be inspired by the right inward disposition, and absolution always must precede it. In my studies I searched the teaching of the Church in the Middle Ages, as well as at the present time, concerning indulgences. The more I studied the more clearly I saw that all the talk of selling absolution for money rests on an absurdity.

The most consoling words in the prayers of indulgence were these: "Can be applied to the souls in purgatory." By this is meant those believing souls who departed the life of earth in the grace of God, but who do not yet enjoy the beatific vision, because slight spots still stain them, so that in the sight of God they are not clean. Nothing unclean can enter heaven, so the last farthing must be paid. As long as it is not, the glowing longing and homesickness of these souls for the face of God cannot be satisfied. They wait and pray and are purified "as though by fire." This purification can be shortened by the loving intercession of the living; thereby the suffering

of these helpless souls is eased and shortened, until at last, pure as angels, they fly to the vision of the thrice Holy One. I soon heartily wished I might dare also to pray for them. Now I understand why once a Protestant said to me that the difference in confessions of faith is simply this: "The Catholics believe more than we do."

I had long combated the proposition that those who in life had loved Jesus, and had died believing in Him, should still suffer anything after death. I consulted a priest about it and he asked me: "When you consider the sufferings of Jesus for the whole world, do you really think it is too much that those whom He calls His should keep Him a little company in suffering, and that all the more, since He has redeemed them from everlasting pain? And can't you well imagine that the state of the highest love also can be that of the highest suffering?" This side of the matter I had never thought of: Suffering of purification....O profound secret! Waiting time for God's children similar to the waiting time in Limbo of our forefathers of old, because only the *perfectly* clean can enter heaven. I said no more.

The more I understood of the spiritual harmony of Catholic teaching, its perfect agreement with the inmost spirit of the Bible, the more I found myself at home in Catholic churches, which stand open for all and everybody. I was no longer afraid that this would be disloyal to Christ, for was not eternal adoration offered to Him there. With gratefulness and love I exposed myself to all the streams of grace, and shared in the holy Mass with the congregation in worshipping silence. The devotion of all centred around the Sacrifice of the Altar. Everybody followed the well-known course of the Mass, and understood the significance of every act. All knew

the meaning of the consecration of the bread and wine. All knew what the little bell announced, without any audible word being needed. All bent the knee: "The Lord is in His holy temple: for Him the whole earth is silent...."

This ever-renewed *Sacrifice* had been represented to us as a daily recurring cruelty. Now through my own experience, I found it a continued love feast, at which Jesus' bloody offering, accomplished once for all on Calvary, was renewed and made present to all believers a thousand times daily over the circle of the globe "in remembrance of Him." After knowing this exalted service, I could not think of any more perfect service to God than this: to offer to God the only true Sacrifice of the New Testament, and every morning to repeat the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world!"....Once I saw the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered at once on six or seven different altars. Only the low voices of the priests could be heard, but it was as if the presence of God passed by through the Church. It could not be denied. One could not kick against the goad. Oh, what a sin, to have taken the sacred Mass from us! Why, oh, why was it done?

From what one reads and hears among Protestants regarding Catholic cultus, particularly the worship of saints, one is persuaded that Catholics dismiss Jesus Christ in favor of Mary and the saints. I was of this opinion. I felt it my duty to examine more closely this article of faith.....It is true that Catholics heartily and highly revere all saints, and Mary most of all. But is there anything wrong in this? I went to the bottom of the matter, and I found that the position of Catholics in this was blameless both in teaching and in practise.

The reverence they show to the blessed Mary and the saints has its root in the excellencies and gifts of grace wherewith God Himself has enriched these His faithful servants. For the sake of God the saints are honored, particularly Mary, because she is that "blessed amongst women" of whom Jesus was born. Like all other creatures, they are nothing by themselves; they can do nothing by themselves. All their glory, all their power they have from God, as the moon receives its brightness from the sun. They are honored as intercessors and examples. Like St. Paul they say to us: "Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ."

Wherever I observed this practice I found no trace of idolatry, neither in the reverence paid to the blessed Mary, nor in the devotion to the other saints. In their catechism both children and adults are taught what *worship* is, and that it belongs solely to God; that the angels and saints *with us* fall down and worship profoundly and reverently before the throne of God, just as the prophets of the Old Testament, and St. John's revelation tell us. I had to admit to myself: If we Protestants in our life of prayer had exercised the real *worship of God,* we would hardly maintain the untrue, trivial and quite unreasonable charge—that Catholics "worship the Saints." which they never have done. We should be ashamed of our ignorance. One needs only to be present at these hearty alternate prayers called litanies to note the infinite difference between the prayer which Catholics address to God, and their invocations for the intercession of the saints with God.....A Protestant gentleman once saw an old woman kneeling before an image of Mary, and asked her: "Is it not so, little mother, you are worshipping the holy Virgin?" The woman was silent. The

gentleman repeated his question, but the woman still remained silent, until the man asked the question a third time. Then she looked at him saying: "You are perhaps insane, sir!"

The devotion to the saints is age old. It arose with the earliest blood witnesses of the Church. Historic sources assure us that the first Christians carefully watched the bones of the Apostles and martyrs and honored them, raising their altars over them. What reverence they showed these faithful servants of Christ who had fallen asleep in the Lord! How urgently they asked their prayers for strength! That could not be sin. There could only be blessing in that. The Catholic catechism says this is right and salutary, and it now seemed to me a *privilege* for God's children to be permitted to become familiar friends with those whose fellow-citizens and housemates they shall be in all eternity in the kingdom of their Father.

I had honestly to admit that all the honor, love and confidence shown to the gracious Virgin Mary, cannot touch *the honor* which God Himself has shown her, in making her the Mother of His only-begotten Son, the Saviour of the world. When at evening the churches again filled with the faithful for the recitation of the litanies, for the Rosary, for the Exposition of the most Holy Sacrament; when I thought of how the vesper hymns, the choir prayers, the unceasing service of God, from hour to hour, from minute to minute, formed a continuous chain of worship encircling the globe, I seemed to see fulfilled the words of the prophet: "Upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen..... till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Is. lxii. 6, 7).

I followed every word, I noted their meaning, and then they ceased to be a senseless repetition, and I saw clearly that between the Church of Christ and that of St. Peter there is *absolutely no contradiction.*

All this I absorbed, not at once, but little by little. I had a hard struggle with myself, with all my deeply rooted ideas, and also with the fear lest I might go astray from the truth, and follow the wrong road. The burning of heretics, the Inquisition, the Night of St. Bartholomew, the persecution of the Waldensians, in short the historic behavior of the Church towards heretics, stood as an insurmountable obstacle between Protestant and Catholic. Up to this time I knew history only from the Protestant side, but after studying these things as presented by impartial, uninfluenced historical critics, I found that much must be ascribed to the sanguinary times. I was glad to discover that some Protestant writers of history had had their eyes opened to the demands of justice. A short excursion into historical works suffices to show that our histories will need much more revision before justice is done to truth. But whoever undertakes to weed the field of history must be first familiar with Catholic doctrines. Without full knowledge of the Church's teaching he will not succeed. Moreover, I saw that any degeneracy in the Catholic Church is severely punished by the chastising rod of the Lord, which seemed to confirm the words of Scripture, that "the judgment begins in the house of God."

Exceedingly great gifts of grace bring with them correspondingly great obligations. Truly great is the authority which Jesus Christ has intrusted to the priesthood of His Church; this great authority imposes the greatest *responsibility.* Every Judas who has been false to his

responsibilities, has brought upon the Church God's punishment of schism and apostasy and persecution. The Catholic writings which I read, particularly the biographies of holy persons, did not attempt to veil the sins of unworthy priests, but presented their terrible crimes in all their naked truth. But in justice to truth, they also pointed out the bright light which shined continually from a worthy priesthood. The Church never has lacked worthy priests. The weeds have never entirely choked the good seed.

I overlooked nothing in my historic studies. The unchastity and simony which once had infested the clergy of the Church, even those in the highest positions, were to me a sufficient explanation of the great apostasy which then occurred. But I asked myself: Did this human wretchedness in high places justify rebellion against the Church, and separation from her? In weighing this question the word of Our Lord about the tares among the wheat came to me. The disciples wanted to weed out the tares. But Jesus said: "No, lest you pull also the wheat with it. Let them grow both together until the harvest....." Jesus plainly foresaw and predicted the presence of tares among the wheat in the field of the Church. The complete cleansing shall not take place until the day of judgment. Therefore nobody is permitted to step out of the community of the Church. Jesus Himself selected frail men to be His disciples. So frail that they all left Him on the night of His Passion. In spite of this He did not abandon them. There was even a Judas among them, a Judas who betrayed Him, and yet he was tolerated by Jesus, Who gave him His love to the end: "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Peter denied the Lord and yet retained his dignity. *The Lord*

did not withdraw His promises from him, but expressly confirmed them after His Resurrection (John xxi. 15-17).

The Church is and remains the Church of Christ in spite of all human frailties. If the Church, if the rock of Peter were human work, she would have disappeared long ago from the earth. The Church has gone through terrible, critical times. More than once it seemed to the human observer that the gates of hell would overwhelm her. It was as if the Lord was asleep, and the ship of the Church seemed about to be submerged in the waves. But the infinitely faithful Lord Jesus was always, though invisibly, present on the vessel of His Church. Therefore she could not, and never can, go under. Therefore her teaching continues unchanged; therefore the Apostolic succession in the priestly office is never interrupted; therefore the Lord provides saints in all ages in the Church to show that the power of the Church is not exhausted, but that the divine life is pulsating in her arteries at all times. The sacramental streams of grace are never dried up. Jesus Himself is present in the Most Holy Sacrament, and the Holy Ghost is the hidden life principle of the Church. Therefore the Church has ever had within her the power to renew and reform herself without having to recede from the path of truth a hair's breadth. She is built on the rock. The gates of hell *cannot* prevail against her; Jesus is with her. Therefore she outlives storm and flood until the last day. Jesus Christ is the life of the Church. *Jesus Christ ever present* in her. Once recognized as the *only* Apostolic Church, which Jesus Christ Himself established on earth as a visible unity, equipped with His office of teacher, pastor, priest, one cannot do otherwise than to follow her, to hear her, to be a living member of her!

Eleven years after he put his thesis on the church door of Wittenberg, Luther gave a memorable testimony which I will quote here. He said: "……That in the Popedom is found the true holy Scripture, the true baptism, the true Communion of the Altar, the true keys for the forgiving of sins, the true office of teaching, the true catechism……," and he continues: "I say, that under the Pope is found the true Christianity, yes, the best and most superior Christianity *(der rechte Ausbund der Christenheit)* and many pious and great saints." Then Luther himself drew the logical sequence of his words, adding: "Accordingly, if under the Pope is the true Christianity, then this Church truly must be the member and body of Christ. If she is the body of Christ then she has the true spirit, the true Gospel, the true faith, baptism, Sacrament, key, office of preaching, holy Scripture, and all that Christianity shall have."

One could not say more than Luther here says himself. For me this confirmation was superfluous. For me the day had come when I saw plainly what I had to do. If I would be *truly evangelical,* so truly must I return home to the Mother Church, the Catholic Church. I wrote down the positive position of faith I had gained in the following words:

Jesus founded one Church on the rock Peter. Peter and the Apostles have the authority to bind and to loose. Jesus promised that He would remain with *this,* His Church, until the end. To *this Church* He has given His Holy Ghost, Whom He sent from the Father. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her. This Church on the rock is the visible image *of His kingdom,* which certainly is not of this world, but yet stands in the midst of the world as the pillar and foundation of truth. Her

teaching is *continually the same* from the Apostles' unto the present day. The Church has this treasure in earthly vessels; fallible men perform an infallible office—by the power of God. *In spite of* fallible men the doctrine remains one, holy and apostolic; the stream of grace remains unweakened, the power of sanctification unshaken, thanks to the constant assistance of the Holy Ghost. (The infallible office of teaching, wherewith Jesus Christ has endowed His Church by the Holy Ghost, only becomes effective when the Pope as the supreme ruler of the Church pronounces a verdict in matters of faith and morals, which shall be binding for the whole Church, according to the Bible and tradition. By such a pontifical verdict, with or without a Church council, the teaching of the Bible or tradition is declared to be a binding dogma, and the opposing error is solemnly condemned.) Now I believe that besides the *written* word of God, the word of God *orally* transmitted must also be held sacred, the so-called *tradition,* or *living* witness, of what Jesus and the Apostles taught, since all was not taken down and written in the Bible; for "the world itself would not be able to contain the books that should be written."

This tradition also ought to be esteemed equally with the Bible, as it is in the same degree the revealed word of God. Christ has given to His *one and only* Church the office of teacher to instruct, of pastor to guide, of priest to offer sacrifice and provide the streams of grace, the seven holy sacraments, of which the greatest is the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At the word of every ordained priest, Jesus becomes verily and truly present on the altar under the form of bread and wine.

I bend my reason under the *obedience of Christ,* that is: under that of the Church. I hold to the words of Jesus: "He who hears you, hears Me," and this to Peter: "Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep." The bishops govern the Church of God, "by the Holy Ghost." I therefore acknowledge the bishops, with the Pope at their head, as the shepherds ordained by God, as the God-given guides in the way of truth.

The Church consists of three parts: the transfigured in heaven form the Triumphant Church; the poor souls in purgatory, the Suffering Church, while the faithful on earth are called the Militant Church. These three branches are in hearty and actual union. They form together *the communion of saints,* as it is called in the apostolic confession of faith. When this was clear to me my way was plain. I sought and found a teacher, a priest of the Order of the Dominicans, who confirmed my convictions, and revealed to me further the full content of the Church with greater transparency and clearness, to the increase of my joy and gratitude unto the present hour. After a few weeks I made the Catholic confession of faith. I confessed my sins in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and washed my whole life in the Blood of the Lamb. Then I received the Lord Jesus Himself in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and the strength of the Holy Ghost, in confirmation. For months I had hungered for the Bread of God from ordained hands. With burning longing I had watched at Holy Mass the Holy Communion given to the faithful! Now I myself am one of the happy ones!

What the blessed have in heaven, we have on earth—only they are in bliss, while we still suffer—*Jesus Christ Himself.* He remains with us in His last wonderful

testament of love to His disciples. He would not leave them orphans. In the most lowly form, in the white Host, He hides Himself, flesh and blood, body and soul, divinity and manhood. We draw near to Him with longing love. Everything is for His service. Because of His presence our churches truly and literally are God's house. For Him we adorn the altar. For Him the candles burn. For Him the glorious cathedrals point their spires toward heaven. For Him the bells chime. For Him the choirs sing. The religious art is in His service. Before His Majesty the faithful people bow.

The strength and the light of every Catholic, the object of his hymn of love unto death, is the ever-present Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament.

Rejoice, O holy Church, for Jesus thy God and Redeemer is ever in thy midst!

This is how I came home to my Mother, the Catholic Church. I only wonder that I was not always in her fold. By voluntary obedience I have adapted myself to her organic order; the salutary commandments of the Church are a joy to me; I find her yoke sweet and her burden easy. I have lost nothing: not liberty of conscience, not the Bible, not personal responsibility to God, not the cross of Christ; and I have gained much. So much that my earthly life will not suffice to contain it, to appreciate it, to thank God for it.

Many misunderstandings and bitter seed should fall away, if only all would seek *the truth* sincerely and honestly *in charity*. To look to Christ in everything was my guiding star, and I am firmly convinced that every Protestant, faithful to the Bible, who has a good will would have reached the same results as I did, if he had had the same experiences in life. Hundreds of others

have gone before me, who for the sake of love for the Crucified Jesus sought the perfect truth and "tried the spirits, whether they were of God." Not to mention the astonishingly numerous conversions to the Catholic Church in England and America, particularly during the last ten years, I will note only the experiences and confessions of our northern countrymen, men such as Overbeck, Stolberg, Professor Ruville of Halle, the Scandinavian theologian, Krogh-Tonning, the Danish Pastor Jensen, the Swiss de la Rive, etc. A common feature of all these men is their strong love of Christ, their courage and purity of intention in their confessions and their unselfishness. I found no romance in them. I am glad to look up to such predecessors.[1]

Usually conversions are explained on the assumption that art-loving or weak natures easily allow themselves to be duped or blinded by the splendor of the Catholic worship. A very erronous presumption. For my part I confess that I was perfectly cold to the splendors of the Catholic Church, so long as I thought her an institution built on fraud; her splendor rather interfered with than promoted my spiritual evolution. Now, that I have found *the truth* in the Catholic Church, her beautiful ritual has become beautiful to me as a due tribute of veneration to the Most Holy Sacrament.

[1] I always studied the religious views of such men in their own writings, these alone being valuable. The dogmatic side of my present confessions has been examined by proper authority. Besides dogmatic sources, I owe much to Mohler's *Symbolic or Dogmatic Oppositions between Catholics and Protestants* (Regensburg, Manz); Wilmer's *Kurzgefastes Handbuch der Kathol. Religion* (Regensburg, Pustet); Schmitz's *Erweiterter Kathol. Katechismus* (Regensburg, Pustet). Such essentially Catholic manuals carry the bishop's *imprimatur*.

My acquaintance with a Catholic certainly started me in my study of the Catholic question. But this was not the reason of my conversion. My resolve is the result and fruit of long struggles in the personal depths of my soul. Through these struggles I have arrived at a clear and firm conviction, and I thank the Lord for it.

Had human considerations weighed with me I could never have gone over. I would be still where I was. Nobody knows better than I the rich work of love and humility of *faithful* evangelical Lutheran Christians. Nobody knows better than I their zeal for sanctification. Among these faithful souls was cultivated my hunger for truth, my longing for God, my love for Jesus, until the grace of God guided me firmly to where I now stand. God only knows what I owe to the dear friends who have carried me in their prayers, little knowing where their intercession would bring me. My friendly feeling for them has not changed. I send them the greeting of an old love made new. May God Who crowns faithfulness reward them for all they have been to me!

May these words serve to promote peace and unity is my prayer to the Lord. But even if we do not perhaps arrive at unity in the spirit of faith here on earth, a unity for which the Son of God urgently prayed the Father (John xvii.), then at least let us in charity not judge harshly, let us as disciples of the Saviour sincerely love one another and be faithful in charity. And may we all sometime be united in the bliss of heaven! Jesus Christ, yesterday and to-day the same, and in all eternity. Amen.

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